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CONCERNING CAESAR'S APPEARANCE

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Julius Caesar's appearance is described or alluded to exceedingly seldom in classical literature. As one of these few references and by far the most important, Suetonius' description (*Iulius* 45) will always be read with the utmost interest. He says: "Fuisse traditur excelsa statura, colore candido, teretibus membris, ore paulo pleniore, nigris vegetisque oculis"

What is meant when Caesar is described as *ore paulo pleniore*? It is with that question that this article will deal.

These words appear without change in all manuscripts, as far as known to me. The translation most frequently given is: "a somewhat full face." To this the not unnatural objection has been made that Caesar's face, as represented in coins and sculpture, was far from full. In fact, most characteristic of his appearance as represented on coins were "die mageren, fleischlosen Wangen."¹ Besides, Plutarch² describes him as *τῆν ξέιν ὦν ἰσχνός*, and, as Bernoulli has observed,³ while full faces are indeed conceivable with thin bodies, yet they are out of the ordinary. To suppose, on the other hand, that his face was full in his youth, but became thin and emaciated later in life, does not seem reasonable, for we find Suetonius in the same sentence, when discussing Caesar's health, carefully indicating the difference between an earlier and a later condition.⁴ Gruter, Burmann, Oudendorp, Baumgarten-Crusius, and others sought to overcome the difficulty by asserting that what Suetonius meant was merely that the face was full "in comparationem reliquorum membrorum." That hardly seems to be the case; so this attempt must fail.

¹ Bernoulli, *Römische Ikonographie*, I, 151.

² *Caes.* 17: "of a spare habit."

³ *Römische Ikonographie*, I, 149.

⁴ "Valitudine prospera nisi quod tempore extremo repente animo linqui atque etiam per somnum exterreri solebat."

Many scholars, therefore, have abandoned the interpretation "full face" and translate instead "full (i.e., large) mouth" or "full lips." Drumann, for example, declares: "Nur eine zu starke Fülle der Lippen störte das Ebenmass."¹ As between these two interpretations Bernoulli² points out that the evidence of coins favors the former.

The only other explanation that I have noted is that the words refer to speech. Baring-Gould³ effectually disposes of this suggestion when he says: "This is not possible from the context. The passage relates to the personal appearance of Caesar."

Nowhere, however, have I noticed any citation of passages to support any one of the several views. I have therefore gathered together all passages that could be found wherein the expression *plenum os* occurs; while there must, from the nature of the case, be many omissions, yet a consideration of those found will not be without value. They are as follows: (1) *Incerti Auctoris Origo Gentis Romanae* 20. 4; (2) Juvenal x. 232; (3) Pliny *Nat. Hist.* viii. 22 (34). 84; (4) Pliny *Nat. Hist.* xxxiv. 8 (19). 81; (5) Lucan vi. 272; (6) Juvenal xiv. 138; (7) Petronius 127. 1; (8) Cicero *De off.* i. 18. 61. Of these eight the first four refer to the mouth (of a bird, animal, or boy) filled with food or air; the fifth passage refers to the full mouth of a river, and the sixth to the full mouth of a bag. The words in the passage from Petronius⁴ are merely an extension of the common expression *plena luna*;⁵ there is, however, considerable similarity here to the meaning "full face" proposed for the words in Suetonius, though we have by no means an exact parallel. The eighth citation⁶ does not support any one of the three interpretations "full face," "large mouth," "full lips."

There is, therefore, really no exact parallel in the examples cited for any one of these interpretations. But we find in the

¹ III², 661. It is interesting to observe the astonishment indicated in the second edition at Drumann's assignment of full lips to Caesar.

² 149.

³ *Tragedy of the Caesars*, p. 43.

⁴ "Ut videretur mihi plenum os extra nubem luna proferre."

⁵ Cf. e.g., Cato *De agricultura* 37. 4; Varro, *Res rusticae* i. 37. 1; Caesar *B.G.* iv. 29. 1. So too Seneca (*Medea* 788) uses *pleno vultu* of the face of the full moon.

⁶ "Ea nescio quo modo quasi pleniore ore laudamus."

Scriptores Historiae Augustae (Trebellii Pollionis *Divus Claudius* 13. 5) an expression that will serve to justify one of them; there, in the account of the emperor's appearance, immediately after *oculis ardentibus* come the words *lato et pleno vultu*. Clearly this means "a broad and full face," and it is a sufficiently close parallel to justify *ore paulo pleniore* in the sense of "a somewhat full face." For the other two translations no authority has been found: *os* may be the mouth, of course, but, when termed *plenum*, it is described as "filled with something," with something, too, that is directly named or easily implied. For the meaning "full lips" no parallel has appeared.

Until, therefore, parallels for the other interpretations are found, we are forced to accept the words, if at all, in the sense "a somewhat full face," and close our eyes to the discrepancy between such a statement and Caesar's appearance as far as known to us.¹

Accordingly, owing to this divergence between the facts and the words ascribed to Suetonius, some of the earlier scholars proposed to emend the passage. Graevius suggested *ore pallidiores* or *paulo oblongiores*; Lipsius, *ore paulo depeniores*; and Heinsius, *ore paulo leniores*. The last reading had suggested itself to me as the correct one before I found that it had been proposed by Heinsius. In spite of the fact that the reading has already been suggested, it seems to me worth while to advance arguments in support of it, especially as I know of no scholar who has accepted it.

It is, first of all, worth noting that in the descriptions of the eleven other emperors Suetonius mentions the expression of the face five times;² of the six biographies wherein the expression is not alluded to, four are short ones, viz., Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Titus. Moreover, three of those wherein it is mentioned follow immediately after the biography of Julius. Had this life, therefore, been lost, the statement that it had probably contained

¹ Suetonius gives us no help in the interpretation of these words, as the only passage at all approaching this one is *Dom.* 18: "vultu . . . ruboris pleno." Here the genitive is found, however, which makes the passage worthless from the standpoint of the interpretation of *plenus*. For the same reason Cicero *Pro Murena* 24. 49 is of no assistance.

² *Aug.* 79. 1; *Tib.* 68. 3; *Cal.* 50. 1; *Vesp.* 20; and *Dom.* 18. 1 and 2.

a mention of Julius Caesar's expression would have been readily accepted.¹

Os in the sense of expression is frequent in Latin.² Suetonius employs it twice elsewhere with this meaning, *Dom.* 18. 2 and *Vit. Vergili* 29.

Accordingly *ore paulo leniore* could readily be interpreted as "with a rather kindly expression."

Paleographically, the change is a simple one. The *p* beginning *paulo* was merely repeated at the beginning of *leniore*, this being the easier on account of the great frequency of the word *plenus*. Parallels may readily be found in the manuscripts of Suetonius.³

The combination *paulo leniore* is found in the same order, though with a different meaning, in *Caes. B.C.* 2. 24, and in the reverse order but with the same meaning in our own author, *Aug.* 65. 3.

Caesar's clemency is, of course, frequently alluded to, and *lenis* is an epithet often applied to him. Thus Suetonius (*Iul.* 74. 1) describes him as *et in ulciscendo natura lenissimus*. There are quite a few other passages where *lenitas* or *lenis* is used with reference to him.⁴ Caesar himself (*Bell. Afr.* 54. 2) speaks of *meae lenitatis, modestiae patientiaeque*,⁵ and styles his demands at the beginning of the Civil War *lenissima*.⁶ And, most striking of all, in the famous letter announcing to Oppius and Balbus his policy of clemency,⁷ he uses the words: *ut quam lenissimum me praeberem*.

¹ So also in describing Charlemagne, Einhard speaks of him as *facie laeta et hilari* (22).

² Cf. e.g., *Cic. Verr.* iii. 80. 187; *Tacitus Annals* i. 43; xiv. 16; xvi. 32; *Gellius* i. 19. 8; and *Horace Epistles* i. 6. 8.

³ *Iul.* 39: *edidit spectacula; edidit espectacula*; *M. Tib.* 4: *deinde functus; deinde defunctus*, GR. So too many believe that in *Lucretius* ii. 1174 *capulum spatio* should be read for *scopulum spatio* (of O), and in vi. 421 *plurimaque eius* for *plurimaque plus* (of OQ). In *Prop.* iv. 1. 146 the reading *persuasae fallere rima* is transformed in O to *persuasae fallere prima*.

⁴ *Bell. Afr.* 86. 2 and 92. 4; *Cic. Pro Ligario* 5. 15; *Pro Marcello* 4. 12; *Vell. Pater.* ii. 35. 3; and *Cic. Cat.* iv. 5. 10. Cf. also *Cic. Pro Marcello* 10. 31, and *Phil.* ii. 45. 116.

⁵ Cf. also *B.G.* viii. 44. 1; *B.C.* i. 74. 7; and *B.C.* iii. 98. 2.

⁶ *B.C.* i. 5. 5.

⁷ *Cic. ad Att.* ix. 7c. 1.

Facial expressions are described as *alacer*,¹ *laetus*,² *benignus*,³ etc. In Suetonius' *Vita Vergili* 4 *miti vultu* is found. *Lene* is, as far as known to me, not used elsewhere with *os*; yet it is used of the expression (*frons*) in Seneca *Ben.* ii. 13. 2, its meaning being made absolutely certain through *humana* and *placida*, which are also employed there.

At this point the objection may be raised: "Granted that *lenis* is an appropriate word and the change easy paleographically, what evidence have we that Caesar's expression was kind?" In reply the evidence derived from sculpture will be considered first, and then that derived from literature.

As to the first, in order to avoid seeing what may really not be present, the descriptions will be quoted from the accounts of others.

T. Rice Holmes⁴ says of the Caesar portrayed in the bust in the British Museum: "He is kindly and tolerant: . . . and mild inexorability is apparent in the expression of this man."

S. Baring-Gould,⁵ in discussing a statue of Caesar (?) as Hermes in the Louvre, says: "The face lacks that kindliness and sweetness . . . that are so noticeable in the portraits taken in later life." Of the statue in the Berlin Museum he declares: "The expression is kindly," while of the basalt bust at Berlin he says: "There are wonderful strength and energy in the head, mingled with gentleness and kindliness." In the British Museum bust he also finds that "there is a wondrous expression of kindness, sincerity, and patient forbearance with the weaknesses of mankind in the face."

Bernoulli in his comprehensive work on *Römische Ikonographie* discusses carefully the various busts and statues purporting to represent Caesar, and describes each.⁶ Of the face of the colossal head in Naples he says: "Eine bedeutende Physiognomie von mildem aber gebietendem Ernst," and he declares of the statue in the Conservatori Palace at Rome: "Die Formen und der Ausdruck des Gesichts stimmen ganz mit dem Neapler überein."

¹ Tac. *Annals* iv. 28.

⁴ *Caesar's Conquest of Gaul* (1911), p. xxiv.

² Tac. *Histories* iv. 81.

⁵ *Tragedy of the Caesars*, p. 41.

³ Val. Max. vii. 8. 9.

⁶ I, 145-81.

No. 56 in Bernoulli's list¹ is thus characterized: "Ein edler Geist und eine milde Gesinnung, verbunden mit mächtiger Willenskraft, sprechen aus den tiefensten Zügen." Of the head in the British Museum Bernoulli says: "Es ist ein schöner, wirklich caesarisch anmutender Kopf, in dessen Gesicht ebenso grosse Schärfe des Geistes als Milde der Gesinnung ausgeprägt ist." In the basalt bust in Berlin he sees "auch der mit Freundlichkeit gepaarte Ernst des Ausdrucks."²

Bernoulli, to be sure, starts with the expectation of finding an expression of "Freundlichkeit und Milde,"³ but he does not hesitate to mention other expressions when he finds them in the busts.

But since "there is not in existence a single bust of which it can be said, with absolute certainty, both that the sculptor intended it to be a portrait of Caesar, and also that either Caesar sat for the likeness or the sculptor had personal knowledge or an authentic likeness to guide him,"⁴ we must turn for surer evidence to the hints scattered in the literature.

Plutarch (*Caesar* 4) informs us of Caesar's affability of manner, and Cicero's realization of the shrewdness of character concealed beneath Caesar's kindness and cheerfulness.⁵ If, however, Plutarch is to be trusted, he gives us a clearer picture of Caesar's expression in *Cicero* 39, where he is discussing the effect of Cicero's

¹ A toga-clad statue in the Berlin Museum (No. 295).

² It is but fair to note that Spon, *Utilité des médailles pour l'étude de la physiognomie* (quoted by Eugène Talbot, *Oeuvres complètes de l'empereur Julien*, Paris, 1863, pp. 263-64), finds no trace of clemency in his countenance; moreover, W. Warde Fowler (*Julius Caesar*, p. 19) believes the expression of the face as represented in the marble in the British Museum to be "keen, thoughtful, and somewhat stern."

³ P. 176.

⁴ T. Rice Holmes, *Caesar's Conquest of Gaul*,² p. xxii.

⁵ . . . πολλή δὲ τῆς περὶ τὰς δεξιώσεις καὶ ὁμιλίας φιλοφροσύνης εὖνοια παρὰ τῶν δημοτῶν ἀπήντα, θεραπευτικοῦ παρ' ἡλικίαν ὄντος. ("Much good-will came to him from the plebeians on account of his friendliness in greeting them and in intercourse with them, since Caesar was inclined to court others to a degree that was quite beyond his years.")

. . . ἐν τῇ φιλανθρώπῳ καὶ ἡλαρῷ κεκρυμμένην δεινότητα τοῦ ἥθους καταμαθὼν Κικέρων ἔλεγε κ.τ.λ. ("When Cicero saw the shrewdness of character hidden beneath his kindness and cheerfulness, he said," etc.)

These passages of themselves hardly justify Drumann's words: "[er] hatte . . . schwarze lebhaftige Augen mit einem Ausdruck von Wohlwollen und Heiterkeit" (III², 661).

speech for Ligarius upon Caesar: ἐπεὶ δ' ἀρξάμενος λέγειν ὁ Κικέρων ὑπερφυῶς ἐκίνει καὶ προὔβαινεν αὐτῷ πάθει τε ποικίλος καὶ χάριτι θαυμαστός ὁ λόγος, πολλὰς μὲν ἰέναι χροὰς ἐπὶ τοῦ προσώπου τὸν Καίσαρα, πάσας δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς τρεπόμενον τροπὰς κατὰδηλον εἶναι, τέλος δὲ τῶν κατὰ Φάρσαλον ἀψαμένον τοῦ ῥήτορος ἀγώνων ἐκπαθῇ γενόμενον τιναχθῆναι τῷ σώματι καὶ τῆς χειρὸς ἐκβαλεῖν ἔνια τῶν γραμματείων. Τὸν γοῦν ἄνθρωπον ἀπέλυσε τῆς αἰτίας βεβιασμένος.¹

To turn to evidence contemporaneous with Caesar, we find Cicero (*Pro Deiotaro* ii. 5) thus addressing him: "in tuis oculis, in tuo ore vultuque acquiesco." Most important of all, however, is the passage in Cicero's *Pro Marcello* iii. 10, also addressed to Caesar: "te vero, quem praesentem intuemur, cuius mentem sensusque et os cernimus, ut, quicquid belli fortuna reliquum rei publicae fecerit, id esse salvum velis, quibus laudibus efferemus!"²

In other words, we must picture to ourselves an expression on Caesar's countenance that revealed his desire to bring safety to all who had survived the actual warfare. What expression could that have been save one, as Wolf says,³ "ex quo summa bonitas elucet et clementia"? Such is the expression seen in so many of the busts of Caesar, such is his expression when hearing Cicero defend Deiotarus, such at times is his expression when listening to the words of Cicero in behalf of Ligarius, and such is the expression with which he grants pardon to Marcellus. What more fitting epithet to apply to that kindly expression than the one used so often by others about Caesar and which Caesar himself was proudly conscious distinguished him from other victors in civil wars?

¹ "But when Cicero had begun to speak, he moved Caesar greatly, and as he proceeded in his discourse, which appealed to the various emotions and was extraordinarily beautiful, Caesar's countenance changed color repeatedly, and it was clear that all the emotions in turn dominated his spirit. And finally when the orator touched upon the struggles at Pharsalus, Caesar was violently affected, his body shook, and he dropped some tablets from his hand. At any rate, under this constraint he freed the man from the charge."

² W. Y. Fausset (*Cicero: Orationes Caesarianae*, Oxford, 1906) comments as follows on this passage: "'Whose mind and thoughts we see reflected in your face, how you wish.' *Ut* explains *mentem sensusque*, with which *os* must be taken closely."

³ In his comment on this passage in his edition of *Pro Marcello*.